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Another Spy Arrest

CONNIE CHUNG: Another American was arrested on spy charges today. Again, the accused spy was working for the Soviets, but this time the source of his secrets came from a new corner of official Washington.

NBC News correspondent James Polk has details.

JAMES POLK: Capitol Hill has its own spy scandal today, the secrets told to Congress said to have been sold to the Russians by a messenger working for a stenography firm with access to top secret documents.

Randy Jeffries was brought to a court hearing on an espionage charge this afternoon after Jeffries was arrested by an FBI undercover agent who posed as a Soviet spy. The FBI said Jeffries worked for Acme Reporting Company, which makes transcripts for the House of Representatives when it meets in closed session on national defense secrets. The FBI said Acme kept copies of top secrets documents in its safe, but failed to shred them, simply ripping them and tossing them into the trash.

The FBI said Jeffries admitted he gave 60 pages to Russian agents, apparently at the Soviet military mission in Washington. The FBI said those were only part of a bagful of papers Jeffries wanted to sell.

An FBI undercover agent met Jeffries at this motel last night, posing as a Soviet spy ready to make the deal. Jeffries was arrested.

UNIDENTIFIED OFFICIAL: He admitted two contacts with the Soviet officials, and also negotiating with them for money

for the documents that he was to present them.

POLK: Jeffries, who is being held without bail, was once a low level FBI employee. Court records show he has a heroin conviction. Jeffries is the fifth person caught in spy cases in only the last month. The first was Jonathan Pollard, accused of spying for Israel. His wife was also charged. Then Larry Wu-Tai Chen, accused of being a Communist Chinese spy inside the CIA. And Ronald Pelton, charged with selling National Security Agency secrets to the Russians.

All these spy cases have triggered criticism on Capitol Hill. But with this latest arrest, it is now Congress which faces problems in keeping something secret.

James Polk, NBC News, Washington.